



The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP

Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for New England

Ref: MC17-000132

13 JAN 2017

The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP
Minister for the Environment and Energy
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I refer to the letter of 23 December 2016 inviting my comment on referral EPBC 2016/7838 (Meadowbank Station vegetation clearing for high value cropping, Mt Garnet, QLD) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

I note the proposed action by Mr Glen Cameron and Ms Laurel Cameron is to clear approximately 1470 hectares on Meadowbank Station (Lot 537, SP132224), located about 100 kilometres south of Mount Garnet, to produce forage and grain crops (sorghum) to supplement livestock on the property and to sell to surrounding cattle stations. The property which occupies approximately 21 500 hectares, is currently used for extensive cattle grazing.

I note, on 28 November 2016, the Queensland Government Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning granted a development permit (SDA-0315-018836) under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* for operational work for clearing of native vegetation (1470.14 hectares) for high value agriculture at Meadowbank Station. I understand the proponent may still need to obtain further approvals under other Queensland legislation, prior to proceeding with the proposed action.

Agriculture production in catchments adjacent to the Reef is worth around \$3.7 billion annually and supports about 44 000 jobs. The Reef catchment is some 42 million hectares and is home to 5 million cattle. In this context, the Department of Environment and Energy should clearly outline the body of evidence that suggests the proposed action at Meadowbank Station, to clear around 1470 hectares on a property of around 21 500 hectares, which is 550 kilometres upstream at the furthest headwaters of the Upper Burdekin river catchment, is likely to impact on the Reef.

Land managers play an important role in managing private land and achieving environmental outcomes. Much of Australia's wealth comes from our natural resources, through agriculture, forestry and fisheries, underpinned by healthy and resilient ecosystems that include soil, water and native vegetation.

Family farmers represent some of Australia's best examples of outstanding environmental stewardship. Through successive generations of ownership, many family farms have acquired a deep understanding of local ecosystems and weather patterns with their adaptive farming practices supporting the long-term sustainability of their land resources. With a focus on passing on the farm to the next generation, family farmers are also conscious of maintaining the productive capacity of the soil and water resources on the farm, and the wider environmental landscape.

The Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper (White Paper) which I released on 4 July 2015 highlights the damage to productivity that poor regulation causes. It can also deter investment and undermine jobs and growth. Cutting red tape is a key component of improving the competitiveness of Australian agribusiness and agriculture and requires efforts by all levels of government. The impacts of native vegetation management regulation has been identified in the White Paper as a major impediment to agricultural productivity improvement, and a compliance cost to farmers.

The Australian Farm Institute observed that the over regulation of the removal of native vegetation effectively prevents an area of farm land having native vegetation growing on it being used for productive agricultural purposes, and in doing so imposes high regulatory, financial and productivity costs on the landholder.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission is currently undertaking an inquiry into Regulation of Agriculture with a final report expected to be released in early 2017. The inquiry focused on regulations that have a material impact on the competitiveness and productivity of Australian agriculture. This includes land-use regulation.

Land managers continue to adopt appropriate farm practices including landscape scale conservation through native vegetation management. This approach will ensure that Australia's farmers continue to be best practice managers and safeguard the future productivity and competitiveness of our farms.

The Coalition Government has a strong policy to support sustainable development. In this context, I would appreciate no unnecessary intervention under the EPBC Act.

I have sent a copy of this letter to Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan, Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, for his information.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on referral EPBC 2016/7838.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Joyce', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Barnaby Joyce MP

cc: Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan, Minister for Resources and Northern Australia